

# Butler Wash WSA



# BUTLER WASH WSA

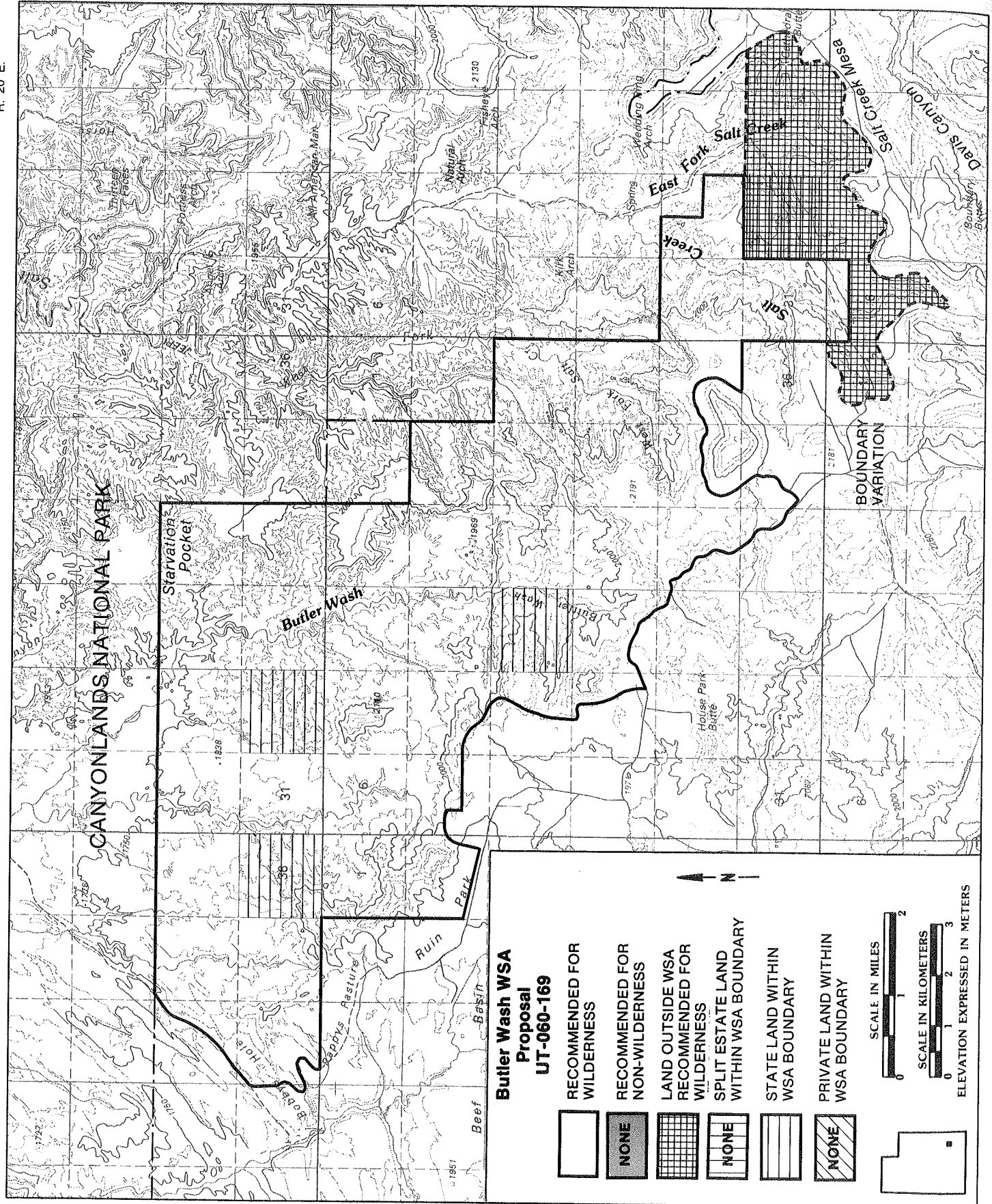
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T. 31 S.

T. 32 S.



# BUTLER WASH STUDY AREA

## 1. THE STUDY AREA: 24,190 acres

The Butler Wash Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (UT-060-169) is in northwestern San Juan County, about 55 miles northwest of Monticello, Utah (population 1,929). The study area is about 8 miles long (north to south) and 7 miles wide (east to west) at its longest and widest points. A proposed wilderness in the Needles Section of Canyonlands National Park borders the WSA on the east and the north; roads, and State lands, and section lines form the boundary of the WSA on the west, southwest, and south (see Map). The Butler Wash WSA contains 22,030 acres of public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

BLM's recommended wilderness for this area includes an additional 2,160 acres of public land which increases the size of the reported study area to 24,190 acres. There are three sections (1,920 acres) of State land inheld within the WSA. One additional section is inheld in the recommended area which increases the in-holdings to 2,560 acres (see Table 1).

The study area is in the Canyonlands Section of the Colorado Plateau Physiographic Province. The terrain consists of northward-draining shallow canyons of varying widths and low, park-like mesas, with scattered buttes, knobs, and spires.

TABLE 1  
LAND STATUS AND ACREAGE SUMMARY IN THE STUDY AREA\*

WITHIN THE WSA	ACRES
BLM (surface and subsurface)	22,030
Split-Estate (BLM surface only)	0
In-holdings (State, Private)	1,920
Total	23,950
WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS BOUNDARY	
BLM (within the WSA)	22,030
BLM (outside the WSA)	2,160
Split-Estate (within the WSA)	0
Split-Estate (outside the WSA)	0
Total BLM land recommended for wilderness	24,190
In-holdings (State, private)	2,560
WITHIN THE AREA NOT RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS	
BLM	0
Split-Estate	0
Total BLM land not recommended for wilderness	0
In-holdings (State, Private)	0

Source: BLM File Data

\* The Appendix is a detailed table of in-holdings included within the portion of the WSA recommended for designation.

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The eastern portion of the WSA is more rugged than the western portion. There are no perennial streams in the WSA. Elevations range from 5,600 feet in the southwest to 7,400 feet along the eastern edge. Vegetation is predominantly pinyon-juniper woodland, with sagebrush in the parks. The climate is arid, with hot summers and cool to cold winters.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the BLM Utah Statewide Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) finalized in November 1990. Two alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: an all wilderness alternative, which is the recommendation in this report, and a no wilderness (no action) alternative.

The all wilderness alternative includes a boundary modification that increases the study area from its original 22,030 acres to 24,190 acres.

Subsequent to publication of the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Final EIS, the Utah State Director approved the San Juan Resource Area Resource Management Plan (RMP). The plan includes approximately 13,710 acres of the Butler Wash WSA in the Butler Wash Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) to protect scenic values. Special management requirements now in effect within the ACEC, where consistent with valid existing rights, include: closure to off-highway vehicle (OHV) use; stipulations to prevent surface occupancy on oil and gas leases (Category 3); requirement for an approved plan of operations with special conditions to limit surface use for mining related activity; closure to disposal of mineral materials; exclusion from private and commercial use of woodland products, except for limited on-site collection of dead wood for campfires; management to limit recreation use if scenic values are being damaged; management to meet Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class I objectives.

Approximately 10,480 acres of the WSA are outside of the ACEC boundary. The majority of this area (approximately 9,500 acres) is classified as semi-primitive non-motorized (SPNM class) under the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum classification system and is man-

aged to provide a predominantly natural environment with limited evidence of human use and, where possible, to provide an environment with some opportunity for isolation. Special management requirements now in effect in SPNM class areas in Butler Wash WSA, where consistent with valid existing rights, include: mineral leasing, geophysical work and disposal of mineral materials with special conditions to limit surface use (Category 2); construction of range improvements and new land treatments so long as they blend with the natural character of the land; limitation of OHV use to designated roads and trails; construction of projects that blend with the natural character of the landscape.

The remaining portion of the WSA (approximately 1,000 acres) is designated open to OHV use and is classified as semi-primitive motorized under the ROS Classification system. The area is open for mineral leasing, geophysical work and disposal of mineral materials with special conditions to limit surface use (Category 2).

### 2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE:

24,190 acres

(recommended for wilderness)

0 acres

(not recommended for wilderness)

The recommendation for this WSA is to designate approximately 24,190 acres as wilderness. This would include all of the original WSA (22,030 acres) plus a boundary modification including an area of 2,160 acres in the Upper East Fork of the Salt Creek drainage. A setback of 100 feet is recommended along approximately 0.75 of a mile of the WSA boundary in T. 32 S., R. 18 E., Sec. 12 to allow for maintenance of the existing road through Ruin Park. This is the environmentally preferable alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The recommendation will further apply to any additional in-holding acreage acquired through purchase or exchange with willing owners. The Appendix lists all in-holdings and provides additional information on acquisition.

All of the recommended area is in a natural condition and has outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive

## BUTLER WASH WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

recreation. The study area is used by commercially guided nature study groups. No conflicts exist with minerals or other land uses. Designation would be complementary with wilderness management in the adjacent portion of Canyonlands National Park.

Approximately 13,710 acres of the recommended area are in the Butler Wash ACEC where restrictions on OHV use, mineral and energy exploration and development, mineral material disposal, and harvest of woodland products would continue to be administratively applied if the area is released from wilderness consideration and protection of wilderness characteristics is not a management objective.

### 3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATION

#### Wilderness Characteristics

##### A. Naturalness

Naturalness is defined as an attribute in which the evidence of man is substantially unnoticeable to the average visitor and where minor imprints of man exhibit no cumulative impact that is substantially noticeable. The entire recommended area (24,190 acres) retains its natural character due to its remote location and rugged terrain. Imprints cover less than 1 percent of the study area.

The WSA is more than 30 miles by unpaved road from the Dugout Ranch on Highway 211. The steep slopes at the heads of drainages in the southern portion of the WSA effectively prevent vehicle travel, and ledges and boulders in the mid-portion of the washes also make vehicular travel difficult.

In the northern part of the study area, 4-wheel drive vehicles are sometimes driven into the lower portions of the washes. A 2-mile vehicular way up Butler Wash reaches an open park in a side canyon (Starvation Pocket). Seasonal rains erase evidence of travel on the wash bottom, and the only evidence of vehicle travel is where wheel tracks leave the wash bottom for less than 0.25 of a mile.

Roads, abandoned drill holes, and reservoirs just outside the southern boundary are not visible from the interior of the WSA.

No surface-disturbing activities have occurred since the wilderness inventory. A helicopter seismograph proposal was canceled on January 26, 1984, before any on-the-ground activities occurred. This proposal was determined to be nonimpairing in the final Environmental Assessment.

##### B. Solitude

The entire recommended area (24,190 acres) provides outstanding opportunities for solitude.

The topography of the unit contributes to the opportunities for solitude. The Butler Wash WSA is contiguous with Canyonlands National Park on the north and the east, and the remote nature of the maze of parks in the Needles District and the canyons of Salt Creek is shared by the Butler Wash WSA. The Salt Creek Canyons in the southeastern part of the WSA and the Needles in the east and northeast provide excellent screening and a sense of isolation.

Off-site intrusions affecting solitude include road cuts on high points east of House Park and an old road cut around a butte on the unit's southern boundary. Evidence of other human activities south of the WSA are well screened from the interior of Butler Wash with steep buttes between them and the lower parts of the WSA.

##### C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

The opportunities for dispersed, undeveloped recreation within this unit are excellent. All 24,190 acres of the recommended area meet the outstanding primitive and unconfined recreation criteria.

Natural parks ringed by colorful sandstone spires and knobs, interesting rock forms and colors, and Indian ruins and rock art all provide focal points of interest to the dayhiker or backpacker. Hiking is easy in the wash bottoms and climbing to high points offers spectacular views over the unique redrock coun-

tryside. The sandstone in the unit provides challenging terrain and numerous opportunities to climb and explore. Erosion of parallel fractures in the rocks has created many narrow passageways that may draw the adventurous. Opportunities include photography, drawing, and sightseeing for botanical, zoological, or geological features.

#### D. Special Features

Approximately 47 percent (11,369 acres) of the study area are rated as outstanding for scenic quality. The scenic value of the unit is high, especially in the north-east and southeast. In the northeast, the Needles country becomes prominent. Red-and-buff sandstone spires, knobs, and buttes contrast with the green vegetation and blue sky. In the southeast, the heads of Salt Creek (most of which is in Canyonlands National Park) cut a myriad of shapes in the colorful sandstone.

The study area contains 13 recorded archaeological sites. There is a potential for 860 sites in the study area. These cultural resources enhance other wilderness values by lending a sense of timelessness to the area in which human use of the land seems short in comparison to the natural forces that shaped it. Evidence of early century cowboy use exists within the unit and adds to an understanding of the historical use of the land. One short brush fence exists in Butler Wash itself and evidence of an old horse or stock trail exists at the head of Butler Canyon leading from Beef Basin.

Cougars, which are often associated with wilderness, are found in the WSA. Peregrine falcon, an endangered species, may also occur in the WSA. Seven other animal species and two plant species that are considered sensitive may occur in the WSA.

Refer to Appendix 4 and the Affected Environment, Vegetation and Wildlife Including Special Status Species sections of the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Final EIS for additional information.

#### Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS)

##### A. Expanding the Diversity of Natural Systems and Features as Represented by Ecosystems

Wilderness designation of this WSA would not add potential natural vegetation (PNV) ecosystems not presently represented in the NWPS.

PNV is the vegetative type that would eventually become climax vegetation if not altered by human interference, and is not necessarily the vegetation that is currently present in an area. The WSA is in the Colorado Plateau Province/Ecoregion.

All of the PNV in the recommended area is juniper-pinyon woodland (24,190 acres). The PNV in the recommended area is represented in the NWPS nationally and in Utah and in other BLM study areas both in and outside of Utah. This information is summarized in Table 2 from data compiled in December 1989.

TABLE 2  
ECOSYSTEM REPRESENTATION

	NWPS AREAS		OTHER BLM STUDIES	
	AREAS	ACRES	AREAS	ACRES
BAILEY-KUCHLER CLASSIFICATION (PNV)				
NATIONWIDE (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE)				
Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	11	1,401,745	84	2,119,815
UTAH (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE)				
Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	1	26,000	53	1,682,008

Source: BLM File Data.



B. Assessing the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation within a Days Driving Time (5 Hours) of Major Population Centers

The WSA is not within a 5-hour drive of any major population centers.

C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas

The Butler Wash WSA would not contribute significantly to balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas within the NWPS. As of January 1987, the NWPS included 117 areas comprising 6,988,052 acres in Utah, Arizona, and Colorado, the adjacent states nearest the WSA.

A Butler Wash Wilderness would supplement the NWPS in the Canyonlands Section of the Colorado Plateau, however, where there are just two established wilderness areas, totaling 70,751 acres. There are three designated wilderness areas within 100 miles of the WSA. About 12 miles south of the WSA is the 45,000-acre Dark Canyon Wilderness, to the east is the 41,189-acre Lizard Head Wilderness and to the west-southwest is the 25,751-acre Box-Death Hollow Wilderness. All of these wilderness areas are administered by the U.S. Forest Service (FS).

Manageability (The area must be capable of being effectively managed to preserve its wilderness character.)

The study area could be managed as wilderness. There are no oil or gas leases in the recommended area. There are no mining claims, and no known deposits of locatable minerals. The study area has little or no potential for potash.

Livestock grazing would continue as currently authorized but would not significantly reduce wilderness values. Control of off-highway vehicles (OHVs) is not anticipated to be a problem, mainly because of the rugged terrain in the WSA. There are four State-owned sections (2,560 acres) in the area recommended for designation and three State-owned sections adjacent to the west, east, and south boundaries of the WSA. If developments occur on these sections, activities and related access would reduce

the quality of wilderness values, however, the potential for development is low.

Energy and Mineral Resource Values

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and U.S. Bureau of Mines (USBM) prepared a mineral assessment report for the Butler Wash WSA (USGS Bulletin 1754-A, Charles G. Patterson, et al., 1989). The report indicates that inferred subeconomic resources of sandstone and sand and gravel exist but because of their abundance throughout the region, their distance from current markets, and their lack of unique properties, these materials have no current likelihood of development. The potential for undiscovered resources of uranium and byproducts vanadium and copper and all other metals is low. There resource potential for undiscovered oil and gas is low to moderate. The resource potential for undiscovered placer gold and silver is low. The resource potential for undiscovered potash and halite (rock salt) is low. The resource potential for undiscovered geothermal energy, coal, and metals other than uranium, vanadium and copper is also low. The resource potential for a rare earth mineral (braitschite) that is present elsewhere in the region is unknown.

Impacts on Resources

The comparative impact table (Table 3) summarizes the effects on wilderness values which is considered to be the only pertinent resource that would be significantly affected by designation or nondesignation of the area as wilderness.

Local Social and Economic Considerations

Social and economic factors were not considered to be significant issues in the EIS.

Summary of WSA-Specific Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Comments received during the early stages of the EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and alternatives for the ultimate management of the WSA.

## BUTLER WASH WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

During formal public review of the Draft EIS, a total of 67 inputs specifically addressing this WSA were received from 1,025 commenters, including oral statements received at 17 public hearings on the EIS. Each letter or oral testimony was considered to be one input. Duplicate letters or testimony by the same commenter were not counted as additional inputs or signatures. Each individual was credited with one signature or testimony regardless of the number of inputs.

In general, 52 commenters supported wilderness designation for part or all of the WSA, while 969 commenters were opposed. Four commenters addressed the relative merits of the EIS but took no formal position on wilderness designation.

Those favoring wilderness noted that designation would complement wilderness proposed in Canyonlands National Park. They also commented on the primitive recreation opportunities and special features in the WSA. The majority of those commenting were from other states. Of particular concern was the need to protect wilderness values.

Those opposing wilderness commented that there is no need for more wilderness; that the WSA could be protected without wilderness designation, which would harm State and local economies; and that wilderness designation would restrict public access to the area. Almost all of those opposing wilderness designation were from rural Utah.

Three Federal agencies, the USBM, the National Park Service (NPS), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) commented on the Draft EIS for this WSA. The NPS favored wilderness designation for Butler Wash WSA; supported the addition of Upper East Fork and Salt Creek to the WSA; and commented that BLM's projected increase in visitor use was too high. The USBM expressed no opinion on wilderness designation for the WSA but commented that BLM underrated the petroleum potential of the WSA. The EPA did not take a position regarding designation of the WSA. The agency commented that several WSAs near Canyonlands National Park, including Butler Wash, should be under similar management or

grouped together to form a larger geographical unit, in order to improve upon integrated multiple resource planning.

No comment letters were received on the Final EIS.

There are four State sections (2,560 acres) in the study area. In commenting on the Draft EIS, the State of Utah expressed general opposition to wilderness designation but did not take a definite position regarding wilderness designation for this area. The State commented that Butler Wash WSA has high wilderness values, which would complement similar values in Canyonlands National Park, and low mineral and energy conflicts. Concerns were expressed about potential impacts to management of critical deer winter range and livestock and the development of groundwater in the deep bedrock aquifer. Additionally, the State commented that, although oil and gas potential may be low, an undiscovered potential for tar sand deposits in the area may exist. The State also clarified that acquisition of state sections adjacent to the WSA were likely because these lands were identified for exchange.

The Butler Wash study area is in San Juan County. The San Juan County Master Plan emphasizes multiple use of public lands and zones the WSA as open range and forest land. The San Juan County Commission is opposed to wilderness designation for the Butler WSA and has endorsed the Consolidated Local Government Response to Wilderness that opposes wilderness designation of BLM lands in Utah. In commenting on the Draft EIS the Commission noted that designation of the WSA as wilderness would be in conflict with the County Master Plan. The Commission also pointed out that State in-holdings in and along the boundary of the WSA would conflict with wilderness management and that the WSA is geologically and ecologically identical to other areas already protected in the GCNRA, National Parks, National Monuments, and FS wilderness within the Colorado Plateau and in San Juan County.



# BUTLER WASH WSA

Table 3  
Comparative Summary of Impacts by Alternatives<sup>a</sup>

Alternatives		
Recommendation		
All Wilderness		
(24,190 Acres)		
Issue Topic		No Action/No Wilderness
Impacts on Wilderness Values	Wilderness designation would preserve the wilderness values in the WSA. It would enhance and complement the National Park Service proposal for wilderness designation and management of contiguous NPS lands.	Wilderness values would not be protected by wilderness designation. No disturbance that would affect wilderness values would be expected in the foreseeable future. Vehicular use of 2 miles of existing way would continue to occasionally detract from opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation in the WSA. This alternative would not complement or enhance the NPS proposal for wilderness designation and management of contiguous NPS lands.

# BUTLER WASH WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

Appendix  
Estimated Costs of Acquisition of Non-Federal Holdings Within Areas Recommended for Designation <sup>a</sup>

Legal Description (Prior to any Subdivision)	Total Acreage	Number of Owners (If Parcel has been subdivided)	Type of Ownership by Estate (Federal, State, Private, Other) (Surface Estate) (Subsurface Estate)	Presently Proposed for Acquisition (Yes, No)	Preferred Method of Acquisition (Purchase, Exchange, Other)	Estimated Cost of Acquisition (Land Costs)	Estimated Cost of Acquisition (Processing Costs)
T. 31 S., R. 18 E., Sec. 36	640.00		State	No	Exchange		\$2,000
T. 31 S., R. 18 E., Sec. 32	640.00		State	No	Exchange		\$2,000
T. 32 S., R. 19 E., Sec. 16	640.00		State	No	Exchange		\$2,000
T. 32 S., R. 20 E., Sec. 32b	640.00		State	No	Exchange		\$2,000

<sup>a</sup> The estimated costs listed in this appendix in no way represent a Federal appraised value of the land or mineral estate, but are rough estimates based on sales or exchanges of lands or mineral estates with similar characteristics to those included in the WSA. The estimates are for purposes of establishing a range of potential costs to the government of acquiring non-Federal holdings and in no way represent an offer to purchase or exchange at the cost estimate included in this appendix.

<sup>b</sup> Located in recommended area outside of the WSA.